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The situation in the Middle East

Measures to eliminate international terrorism

Letter dated 22 November 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The recent escalation in the ongoing Palestinian terrorist campaign continues to claim the lives of innocent men, women and children in criminal acts of despicable cruelty.

Yesterday morning at rush hour, a Palestinian suicide bomber from Bethlehem detonated his explosives on a crowded public bus, filled with schoolchildren and morning commuters, in Jerusalem's Kiryat Menahem neighbourhood. The blast killed 11 people and injured 50 others. Of those killed, four were children on their way to school, between 8 and 16 years old, including a mother and her son and a grandmother and her grandson, as well as a national of Romania. Over half of those wounded were under the age of 18. Witnesses described a horrific scene of people being burnt alive, with the charred remains of schoolbooks and lunches strewn among the dead and wounded. The terrorist organization Hamas, which operates openly from Palestinian Authority territory and is funded by several States, including Iran, immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.

Reports from eyewitnesses suggest that the bomber boarded the bus several stops before he detonated his explosives, waiting for it to become filled with passengers. The bomb itself was packed with shrapnel, ball bearings and screws so as to increase the pain and suffering of the victims. Indeed, the timing and manner of this horrific terrorist attack and the fact that the targeted bus stops at four schools on its route suggest that the bomber deliberately intended to murder and maim not just innocent civilians, but schoolchildren specifically. Unfortunately, this is consistent with the tactics adopted by all Palestinian terrorist groups, which are intentionally designed to cause the greatest possible amount of death and injury to innocent civilians.

In view of the steadfast and criminal refusal of the Palestinian leadership to meet its moral and legal responsibilities under international law, Security Council

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resolutions and its own signed commitments to combat this continuing crime against humanity, and of the official Palestinian culture of hatred and incitement which nurtures such terrorism, Israel is compelled to take the defensive measures necessary to protect its citizens. The fact that the bomber came from Bethlehem, a town from which Israeli troops had recently withdrawn in return for a commitment that peace and order would be maintained by Palestinian security personnel, and from which, despite this withdrawal, attempts to organize and perpetrate terrorist attacks have continued, shows that Israeli defensive operations are, unfortunately, the only protection standing between the terrorists and their intended victims.

Israel repeats its call to all members of the international community to condemn unequivocally this horrific terrorist attack and the morally bankrupt and inhuman terrorist strategy adopted by the Palestinian leadership. More importantly, the international community must demand and accept nothing less than the complete implementation by the Palestinian side of a policy of zero tolerance for terrorism and incitement, as required by international law and Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 1373 (2001) and 1435 (2002), and consistent with the global campaign against terrorism and its supporters.

Until such time, the international community must hold the Palestinian leadership accountable for its horrific crimes and make it clear that terrorism will not be rewarded by political concessions of any kind, and that Israel, like any State which is the victim of terrorism, will be fully entitled, as is its right and duty, to take defensive measures in accordance with international law. Indeed, until the Palestinian leadership is compelled to abandon its embrace of terrorism, its support and celebration of the deliberate targeting of innocents and its glorification of the murderers of women and children as "martyrs", there can be no hope for peace in the region, for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

I submit this letter in follow-up to numerous letters detailing the campaign of Palestinian terrorism since September 2000.

I would be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter circulated as a document of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly, under agenda items 36 and 160, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Yehuda **Lancry**
Permanent Representative